

'My Mother Wasn't Afraid of Death,' Says Daughter of Slain Mrs. Mills



"When I went into the grand jury room I felt absolutely alone," says Charlotte Mills (above), in this pathetic installment.

"There were women on the jury. Don't tell me women are kind to other women. I was sneered at and asked insulting questions."

"I have had at least fifty proposals, and for every nasty letter I got I must have gotten at least five sweet ones."

"One unkind letter writer said I was a publicity seeker and sent a black crepe veil, advising me to wear it. Black crepe makes good dusting cloths."

In Outburst of Grief, She Resents Criticism

When Mrs. Eleanor Mills gazed at the dull-gleaming barrel of a revolver on the Phillips farm that night when she was murdered with the Rev. Edward Hall, did she cry out for fear, or was her scream a welcoming salute to death? Did she see in the inevitable approach of death a solution of her problems? Did she foresee happiness with the man she loved in the eternal land of Death? Or did she cry out frantically for a little more time in this land of mortal love?

Read Charlotte Mills's revelation of her mother's striking philosophy of death!

BY

Charlotte Mills

(Copyright, 1926, by Famous Features Syndicate, Inc.)

MY dear mother's funeral was held from the undertaking parlor because our house was too poorly equipped for such a thing.

To keep myself up, I thought of the many times mother and I had talked about death, and the cheery way she felt about it. I was always afraid of dying. Even when I was small, I used to think about it, and shiver and cry to imagine how awful it would be to go into the dark somewhere, away from my people and friends and pleasures. All alone, too!

Mother would say: "Don't cry about it, child. The reason you feel afraid of death is because you are having a good time here. When you are older and know what life is, and disappointments come, and griefs and sickness, you won't be so crazy about living. You will get tired. Dying won't frighten you. Death will seem like a good, kind, old friend. That's how I feel about it. I'd like to have just one little bit of happiness—then I'd be perfectly will-

ing to go out—pouf!—like that, and gayly!"

Both mother and I detested mourning and mother made me promise never to wear it for anybody. But Aunt Anna felt I ought at least to wear black on the day mother was buried, so she bought me a good dress—the second "boughten" one I ever owned in my life. Mother made even my party frocks, and they were always perfect, she sewed so beautifully. I wore a little black velvet hat of hers; it made her seem closer to me. I still have it.

Mother was buried in her choir vestments. I had a hard time getting them. The church people wanted her to wear some old dress that didn't even belong to

her. But I went to her locker myself and got out her shabby old surplice and cassock and some underthings she had made herself and took them to the undertaker, with a pair of black silk stockings and some slippers. We never saw her in the casket. . . . It was better not.

When I got back to the empty house I felt dead myself. I couldn't seem to realize what had happened. I was numb.

I want to say a word about the cost of mother's coffin, which caused so much criticism.

Defends Coffin Cost

If it was too expensive I was to blame, for I picked out all the things. I was young and dreadfully upset and, as I saw it, nothing—nothing—could be too good or too costly for my mother. I didn't think of the cost. I just chose everything blindly.

It was a heavy burden on father, I realize now. But it has somehow been taken care of.

Immediately after the funeral things began to press around us. Our house was jammed the whole time with people—from the police, from the court, from the newspapers, from the neighborhood, friends, strangers, everybody.

The most fantastic thought kept coming to me: "As soon as mother comes, she'll straighten out all this mess!" Then I would have the sickening realization that it was just because mother never would come back that this was all happening.

Dreadful questions were asked me, and dreadful things were hinted at. They treated my father terribly, too, trying to make him say he had sneaked out of the house late the night of September 14, and sneaked in again and to bed. They tried to trip us up and make us say things that were lies about mother and Mr. Hall and ourselves.

We were haled to hearings and inquiries and grand juries, and there were investigators and prosecutors and special detectives and lawyers and officials and newspaper reporters—Oh! Sometimes I would be told I

must speak out, and then I was told I talked too much. Some would tell me to "forget it" when I tried to tell what I thought about the killings, and often I was told "This is no business for little girls like you. Keep your mouth shut."

When I went into the grand jury room I felt absolutely alone, as though every one was against me. From the questions I was asked and the way they asked them, you would have thought I had committed some crime myself instead of being the sufferer from one. They attacked ME.

Found Women Cruel

There were women, too, on the jury, and don't tell me women are kind to other women. Perhaps I am what people like to call "a man's woman," for although I have never been overly interested in boys, I certainly have a general indifference and even fear where women are concerned. There are only three of my own sex, outside of mother, that I have ever really confided in. One was my girl friend, one a married woman friend, and the third a newspaper writer who was somehow different from the others.

During the grand jury inquiry four years ago I was stared at and sneered at and asked the most insulting questions about where I got my clothes, what I did evenings, what time I got home, who my friends were, what mother did evenings, afternoons, Sundays—oh, things that make me choke with shame and anger, they were so unjust and cruel.

But the Hall family! THEY were treated with every consideration and delicacy. They seemed to be held sacred. I don't doubt that Mrs. Hall suffered, but compared with what we went through in those days and since she doesn't know what humiliation means.

But I will not put too much bitterness in this story. There is much kindness in the world, after all, and some justice.

Letters began to pour in upon me. For every nasty one I must have gotten five sweet ones. In

all, both after the investigation four years ago and now, during the reopening of the case, I have received several hundred letters.

One man wrote that my pictures reminded him of a lost love and he wanted me to marry him on the strength of that. I have had at least fifty proposals. A mother wrote that her daughter was lonely and maybe I was, too, and wouldn't I come and visit them and feel at home? I loved that letter.

Many contained invitations for the day—to dinner, for motor rides, etc., usually ending with the sentiment: "You must feel lost and need companionship. We offer you friendship." Those were beautiful, kind letters.

Then a man wrote, saying he had five children and would like me to marry him and help take care of them! One chap at Saranac Lake said he admired the stand I took at the hearings and my writing to Gov. Edwards that time to say I was dissatisfied with the way the investigations flickered out.

Touched by Gifts

A woman and her daughter who said they were working people sent me many gifts—mostly things they made. They sent a whole suitcase of things, and it touched me very deeply. There were blouses and cuff-and-collar sets, stockings, work aprons, slippers, nightgowns. I like to jamas myself, so I gave the nightgowns to a friend. But they sent a lovely suit and I wore it four years. It must have been expensive, and I confess I adore "quality" things. I'd rather have one good dress or hat and wear it all the time than a dozen cheap rags.

Among the unkind letters was one that said I was a publicity seeker and a bad girl; and in a separate parcel the writer sent a black crepe veil, advising me to wear that and not be so brazen. Black crepe makes good dusting cloths.

(In Monday's installment of her dramatic story, Charlotte Mills discusses the question of who is guilty of the Hall-Mills murders.)